



TEACHER'S GUIDE

Includes Discussion Questions and an Exclusive Letter from the Author

About *LOVE SUGAR MAGIC*



Leonora Logroño's family owns the most beloved bakery in Rose Hill, Texas, spending their days conjuring delicious cookies and cakes for any occasion—and no occasion is more important than the annual Día de los Muertos festival. Leo hopes that this might be the year that she gets to help prepare for the big celebration...but, once again, she is told she's too young.

Sneaking out of school and to the bakery, she makes a startling discovery: her mother, aunt, and four older sisters have in fact been keeping a secret. They're brujas—witches of Mexican ancestry—who pour a little bit of sweet magic into everything that they bake.

“I found out that we have magic, and what's the point of having magic if you can't use it to fix things?”

Leo knows that she has magical ability as well, and she's more determined than ever to join the family business—even if she can't let her mamá and her hermanas know about it yet. And when her best friend, Caroline, has a problem that needs solving, Leo has the perfect opportunity to try out her craft. It's just one little spell, after all....What could possibly go wrong?

From debut author Anna Meriano comes a story of family and friendship filled to the brim with amor, azúcar, and magia.

About the Author

Anna Meriano grew up in Houston, Texas, with an older brother and a younger brother but (tragically) no sisters. She graduated from Rice University with a degree in English and earned her MFA in creative writing with an emphasis on writing for children from the New School in New York. She has taught creative writing and high school English and works as a writing tutor. Anna likes reading, knitting, playing full-contact quidditch, and singing along to songs in English, Spanish, and ASL. Anna still lives in Houston with her dog, Cisco. Her favorite baked goods are the kind that don't fly away before you eat them.



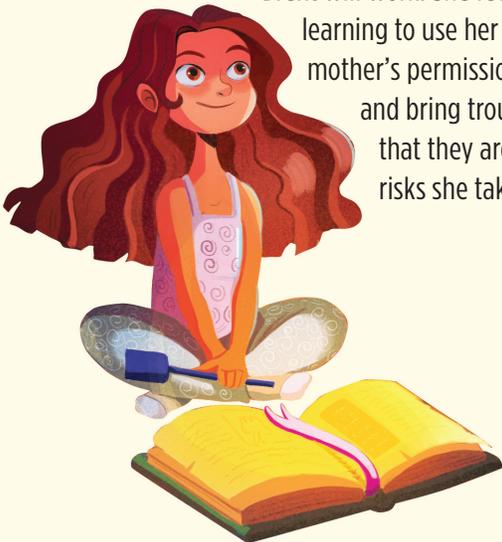
Pre-Reading Activity

Have students research Día de Los Muertos customs as practiced by Mexicans and Mexican Americans. What is the significance of this day? What images are part of the observances? What legends? What foods? What types of activities take place?

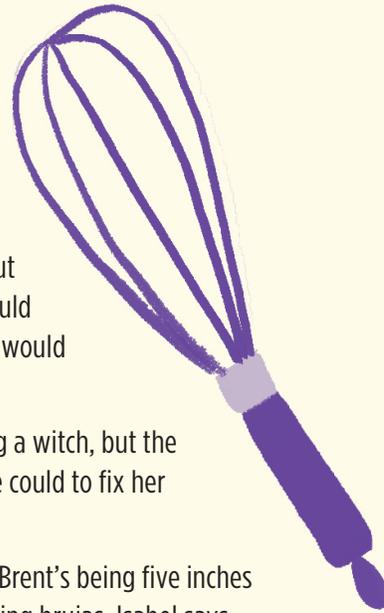


Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the book, how are the main character, Leonora Legroño, and her family—four sisters, her mother and father, introduced? Describe Leo’s relationship with each of her sisters. How does she feel about the fact that her sisters are all allowed to help in the bakery on the eve of Día de los Muertos, while she isn’t? Why is this day Leo’s favorite of all the year?
2. Leo does not speak much Spanish. How do the few Spanish words she understands—especially the word *magia*, affect her? How would her efforts to uncover her family’s secret be helped if she spoke a bit more Spanish?
3. Leo’s curiosity runs wild as she tries to figure out her family’s secret during the Día de los Muertos observances. She decides her only option is to snoop. But soon she is more puzzled than ever, and even gets caught snooping. But in this she is a bit lucky because the sister who discovers her is Isabel. Why is she lucky that Isabel is the one who discovers her?
4. Isabel lets Leo in on the family secret: the females are *brujas* (good witches). Does this tame Leo’s curiosity? Of course not! “This was magic, and Leo wanted more.” Another important part of Leo’s personality is explained this way: “Patience had never been Leo’s strong point.” In what ways do Leo’s curiosity and impatience drive her to do things that might not be sensible?
5. When Leo’s mother invites her to help make cinnamon rolls for Sunday breakfast, Leo is very tempted to tell her what she has learned about her family’s magical abilities—and her own. Even though she is an impatient person, she hesitates. Why? Was that a good idea? How might her mother react if she found out?
6. Leo thinks: “What was the point of having magic powers if you couldn’t use them to help your friend?” Is this an example of her using good sense? Why or why not? IS SHE BEING REALISTIC when she says, “There’s no way anyone would know it was us”? Does Caroline agree with her? Which of the two friends is more adventurous? Which one is more sensible? Does their plan to cast a spell on Brent seem as though it is likely to work out well?
7. Leo is confident as she and Caroline set out to make the magic gingersnaps. What makes her so sure that the recipe is going to work out the way she expects it to? Does that make readers feel like it’s a warning sign?
8. Impatient Leo has a hard time waiting to find out if the magic cookies she and Caroline made for Brent will work. She feels both proud and guilty at the same time. Proud because she is learning to use her magic powers. Guilty because she is using her magic without her mother’s permission and because it is just possible that the spell could go wrong, and bring trouble on Caroline, or Brent, or all of them. Ask students to imagine that they are in Leo’s situation. How would they feel? Would they take the risks she takes, or would they be more cautious?
9. Considering Caroline’s reaction to the foul-up with Brent, Leo thinks, “Friends were different from sisters, because no matter how angry you made your sisters, they would always be your sisters.” Ask students to consider the quote above, and discuss the ways in which it is correct, or incorrect, based on their observations and experiences.



10. As Leo scrambles to reverse the spell on Brent, she feels pretty awful. “Guilt from all her lies grew bigger and bigger like rising dough in her stomach, but she didn’t have a choice if she wanted to fix her mistake.” Discuss Leo’s situation with students. Have they ever found themselves in a fix like this—where something has gone wrong, and trying to straighten it out makes things horribly worse? If they were in Leo’s situation, would they keep going on by themselves trying to fix the situation, or would they ask for help?
11. Discuss this sentence: “She didn’t know all the rules about being a witch, but the rules of being a good person meant she had to do whatever she could to fix her mistakes.”
12. As Marisol and Isabel are drawn in to help solve the problem of Brent’s being five inches tall, they each talk about their different points of view about being brujas. Isabel says, “Having magical abilities...it doesn’t mean holding power over people. It’s supposed to be a way to express your love. A way to take care of each other.” To which Marisol replies: “But taking care doesn’t always mean covering for....Not if the person you love is playing with fire.” Both sisters are expressing strong feelings about the subject. What does the difference in their points of view say about each of their personalities and characters? How do their points of view affect how they treat Leo?
13. When Abuela (Leo’s late grandmother) appears in Leo’s bedroom after she is summoned by Alma and Belén, Leo does not seem as disturbed as she might be at the sight of a ghost. Why might that be? How does Leo feel when Abuela tells her that it is only Leo herself who can reverse the spell? How does that make Brent feel?
14. As Leo struggles to fix Brent’s situation, she faces the fact that “she alone...had started this whole mess, and now she had to work alone to fix it.” In spite of Leo’s strong opinions about magic, and about being included in the activities of her mother and sisters, and given her impatience and her curiosity, if she had it to do all over again, would she have made the same choices? Discuss.
15. Discuss Leo’s mother’s reaction to Leo’s actions and her capabilities. Consider together the good and the bad of what Leo did. Ask students if they can imagine why Leo’s mother reacted the way she reacted? Do they agree with her reaction?



The discussion questions in this guide can be correlated to the following Common Core State Standards:
 Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4-7.1, 4-6.2, 4-6.3
 Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4-6.6

MEET ANNA MERIANO

I started writing stories before I could remember whether the words should go from right to left or left to right. In kindergarten art class, on long summer road trips, or in middle school study hall, I was always stealing time to read another chapter or start another story. I'm extremely excited that my debut novel, *Love Sugar Magic: A Dash of Trouble*, will continue my long tradition of writing about girls with magical powers getting into trouble.

I grew up in Houston with an older brother and a younger brother, and a large but close-knit network of aunts, uncles, and cousins spreading across the state of Texas. As a young reader in the fourth largest city in the nation,

I always felt the lack of Texan stories that didn't include cowboys or tumbleweeds. I have Mexican, Italian, and Irish heritage, complicated by the fact that my Irish mother moved to Guadalajara with her family during elementary school, while my father grew up in Texas barely speaking Spanish. The main character of *Love Sugar Magic*, Leo Logroño, struggles with her Spanish, which is an issue I see in my own family, in myself, and in the students I teach. I loved writing a narrative that affirmed Leo's culture and heritage—shaky Spanish and all—as something to be celebrated and enjoyed.

Writing *Love Sugar Magic: A Dash of Trouble* was a challenge since I know almost nothing about baking, but on the bright side, I got to do lots of research by visiting bakeries and eating pan dulce. I've always believed in the magical powers of a warm cookie, and my family taught me that sharing dessert can be a great way to spread love.



As a young reader, I devoured books about dragons, fairies, and magicians, but I also loved reading historical fiction to learn more about the world. Some of my favorite books growing up included *Matilda*, *Ella Enchanted*, and *Holes*, as well as series like the American Girl books, Harry Potter, and Tamora Pierce's *Circle of Magic*. Some books I've read recently that I won't stop recommending to my friends are *The Gauntlet*, *The First Rule of Punk*, *Roller Girl*, and *The Inquisitor's Tale*. I can't wait to dive into some of my fellow 2018 releases like *Hurricane Child* and *Front Desk*.

I earned my MFA in creative writing from The New School in New York, where I was lucky to meet CAKE Literary founders Dhonielle Clayton and Sona Charaipotra, who started me on the *Love Sugar Magic* journey.

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